



Early Journal Content on JSTOR, Free to Anyone in the World

This article is one of nearly 500,000 scholarly works digitized and made freely available to everyone in the world by JSTOR.

Known as the Early Journal Content, this set of works include research articles, news, letters, and other writings published in more than 200 of the oldest leading academic journals. The works date from the mid-seventeenth to the early twentieth centuries.

We encourage people to read and share the Early Journal Content openly and to tell others that this resource exists. People may post this content online or redistribute in any way for non-commercial purposes.

Read more about Early Journal Content at <http://about.jstor.org/participate-jstor/individuals/early-journal-content>.

JSTOR is a digital library of academic journals, books, and primary source objects. JSTOR helps people discover, use, and build upon a wide range of content through a powerful research and teaching platform, and preserves this content for future generations. JSTOR is part of ITHAKA, a not-for-profit organization that also includes Ithaka S+R and Portico. For more information about JSTOR, please contact support@jstor.org.

ART. III.—*Letters from Paris, on the Causes and Consequences of the French Revolution.* By WILLIAM C. SOMERVILLE. Baltimore. Edward J. Coale. 1822. 8vo. pp. 390.

THIS work, containing a review of the recent political history of France, is obviously the production of one familiar with the literature and language of the French, and industrious in obtaining correct sources of information. An American, returning from a tour in Europe, can hardly perform a more useful service, than by publishing a dispassionate examination of the civil condition of the continental states. This is a subject about which we need information, and such information as cannot be easily collected except in the countries themselves.

It is the leading object of Mr Somerville to show, that the French Revolution was justified by sufficient causes, that the spirit of liberty has not to bear the reproach of the enormities which attended it, that it has been followed by many permanent effects beneficial to France, and, finally, that the cause of liberty is really gaining ground, and must under some form at last be triumphant. We hope that all these positions are true ones. Some of them certainly are so. Our author's remarks extend to a wide range of former history and present politics, and we must content ourselves with touching on some of the general topics which they suggest.

Whoever considers the state of Europe about twenty years before the close of the last century, cannot but perceive that all the forms of government were ripe for change. A desire for civil liberty began to be active among the nations, just as three centuries before the understanding had revolted against the tyranny of the church over the conscience. But at the time of the reformation, there were no examples of a successful vindication of the freedom of faith; while now the government of England had served for two centuries as a monument of the tranquillity and glory, which are secured by free institutions; and a recent yet splendid revolution, in a distant quarter of the world, had established the advantages of successful resistance.

The constitutions of Europe had outlived themselves. Whatever remained of the forms of the middle ages had

ceased to be respectable, because it was no longer sustained by the state of society. It needed not much of the prophetic spirit to foretell the speedy dissolution of the German empire. And even in the few free governments, the Dutch republic was weakened and distracted by the collisions of armed factions, and the fatal invitation given by each party to foreign princes to join in the struggle ; while Venice, like a merchant who has withdrawn from business, was no longer enumerated among the influential powers.

Morals and honor had long since lost their control over politics. For a statesman to have been a philanthropist, or a man of strict integrity in his public functions, would have been an anomaly. The different kings, possessed of scattered dominions, and passionately desirous of consolidating their power and connecting their territories, made exchanges of provinces, as if allegiance and willing submission to government were matters of barter and trade. The strength of kingdoms was measured by the statistical tables, and the moral energy of nations was entirely forgotten.

All the princes of the continent had their standing armies, and the people was everywhere defenceless. But the finances of no one were in a condition, which promised permanent security and prosperity ; and no government was strenuously supported by the affections of its subjects.

The power of public opinion, which is now universally conceded, was just beginning to make itself felt and known. Salutary principles were finding their way slowly among the people, but had not yet been defended by loud expressions of general assent.

The principles of a liberal democracy began to be at work in the monarchies, and it was seen, not only that the interests of the people and of the princes, but also their desires and purposes were at variance. The ruler and the ruled were arrayed against each other, and even to the superficial observer there seemed no doubt, which party would be the uppermost. But though the advocates of ancient usage had their armies already organized and at command, and no means of resistance were visible on the other side, it was still obvious, that hereditary rank had lost its control over the mind, and that the resources of the people, when brought into action, would produce results of incalculable importance.

It was easy therefore to foresee, that a struggle would ensue between hereditary privileges and natural rights ; and it was also to be expected, that the defenders of the former would be confident in maintaining what long usage had yielded to them, would feel strong in the forces, which were at their disposal, and despise opposition from a party, which had no public representatives, no influence in the government, and no means of organizing or wielding an army.

Add to this, that the manners of the higher orders had grown thoroughly dissolute ; the sanctity of marriage contracts was treated as a jest ; the connexion between parent and child was dissolved at birth ; the bonds of natural fondness served no longer to restrain or guide the energies of the young. And yet the nobility claimed the same superiority, which they enjoyed in the earlier ages, when the spirit of contemplative devotion sanctified and elevated the character of woman, and disinterested valor, and honor, and education, conferred real superiority, no less than a poetic interest, on the champions of chivalry.

The spirits of men rose against this tyranny of vice and rank. The laws, unjustly administered, left the mechanic and the tradesman to defray the expenses of the government, and feed the vices of the nobles ; and justice and prudence demanded opposition to so unequal a condition. The haughty superiority claimed by the nobles, was now a superiority of birth, not of intelligence and benefits ; and therefore the pride of men could endure it no longer. A word from a minister, a scrap of paper signed by royalty, could imprison at pleasure, without reason, and without termination. Science and poetry were restrained in their efforts, and truth could not make her appearance in the world, unless she too paused, and asked permission in the antichambers of the powerful. Is it strange then, if men grew impatient of the thralldom in which they were held ? They felt, moreover, that the cords which bound them were decayed, and that it needed only a strong arm to rend them asunder.

The remarks, which we have made, do not apply to France alone, but to nearly the whole of the European continent. For when the revolution commenced in that kingdom, the other nations were watching its progress with the deepest anxiety, prepared to imitate its institutions if they should prove to be wise and salutary.

In tracing the causes of this state of things in France, Mr Somerville ascends far into anterior history, and shows the gradual operation of evils, which had long been increasing. 'The greatest and best kings of France,' he observes, 'have been those who were not born with a certain prospect of wearing the crown, but came into possession of it by accident, after having learned wisdom in the school of adversity.' p. 72. Louis Twelfth, Francis First, and Henry Fourth, are the princes, whom he selects as the wisest and most benevolent sovereigns of France prior to the revolution.

The benevolent character of Louis Twelfth, which made him desirous of promoting the happiness of the nation, and careful to avoid oppression, secured to France internal tranquillity and prosperity, though his unhappy desire of Italian conquests continued the ruinous expeditions against Milan. After all his reverses it would still seem, that at his death, little was wanting to the domestic prosperity of France, but the lustre of the fine arts and letters.

The influence of Francis First on the character of his nation was great and permanent. He rendered his own age miserable by his ambition of conquest, and his headstrong chivalrous courage, but he gave an impulse to learning, and introduced the fine arts from Italy. The first of the Lombard artists, the incomparable Leonardo, is said to have died in his embrace, and Benvenuto Cellini, that most ingenious, interesting semibarbarian, was for a considerable time his pensioner. Yet he was too much a voluptuary to be either truly great or truly liberal; and the fires of religious persecution continued to burn, even while policy dictated an alliance with protestant Germany.

The years, which succeeded the death of Francis, exhibit France distracted by internal factions, disgraced by the atrocious crimes of the Guises, and deprived of all foreign influence during the decline of the kingdom. At length Henry Fourth appeared to save and restore her. He had been disciplined in the school of persecution and adversity, and his natural qualities were so excellent and so amiable, that, but for the stain on his morals as a libertine, we might rank him among those, whose memory good men should cherish and defend. Mr Somerville, who is no admirer of Louis Fourteenth, dwells with complacency on the excellence of Henry's

character, the order, regularity, and justice which he introduced, and the plans for future improvement which he devised. He encouraged agriculture, promoted learning, proposed improvements in the inland navigation, and was instant in his endeavors to promote toleration and annihilate the influence of fanaticism. To Henry Fourth, therefore, we must ascribe the late prosperity of France, and its safety from dismemberment and civil murders. In 1624, the ministry of Cardinal Richilieu commenced, and during the eighteen years that it continued, his powerful influence was pernicious to liberty. To increase the royal authority at home, and extend the influence of France on the councils of Europe, were the guiding principles of his policy. 'Richilieu endeavored to destroy virtue by converting honest men into courtiers. In order to weaken the influence of the nobles in the provinces, and destroy their popularity, he obliged them to live in Paris.' 'His system of policy, which went to invigorate the head at the expense of all the other members of the body politic, created the fatal ascendancy of Paris over France.' p. 85. Yet, 'at the death of Richilieu and Louis Thirteenth, France was beginning to gather some of the fruits of the wise administration of Sully.' The state of society, of industry, and of letters, was improving. Corneille had already begun his career of glory, and Descartes filled Europe with his reputation. The nation, however, was still involved in superstition, and the laws enjoined death as a punishment for whatever superstition might convert into crime.

Of Louis Fourteenth we have never been able to hold a very elevated opinion. Admiration is lavished on kings, for whom fewer virtues, than are necessary to ensure respect as a private man, gain the reputation of justice, clemency, and a liberal fondness for the arts. Louis was educated to play the king, and this he learnt to do with success. He knew how to impose by a stateliness of manner, but that very stateliness betrays a weakness of character, and a consciousness of wanting direct superiority; and the pleasure, which he received from observing that others were intimidated by his deportment, betrays all the insignificance of vanity. As a politician he was unjust and cruel; criminally ambitious; still more criminally fanatical; prodigal and improvident. He found a kingdom in opulence, and at his death he left the

nation impoverished and the finances in a state of ruin. Of the merits of his ministers and their claims to public gratitude, the most different estimates have been formed ; but during his long career the administration had no unity of character, a sure proof that his own mind did not direct it. When Louis Fourteenth read *Telemachus*, he called it a libel on his reign. What severer censure can be passed on his character as a king ?

As to the arts, he encouraged them in so far as they were subservient to his own vanity. Some of the first artists of his age were employed in decorating the palace walls of Versailles ; but the subjects given them were of a nature to chill the warm impulses of genius. And in letters it is melancholy to learn, that Racine, the finest poet of his age, could be so weak as to pine under royal censure ; still more melancholy to find the virtuous Archbishop of Cambray rejected and persecuted, for inculcating simple lessons of morality. But not to insist on his particular hostility to one who desired, and another who deserved his protection, we do not read, that Louis called forth original genius, or rewarded it very bountifully, nor that he rewarded any but such as repaid his protection by flattery.

It is right, that the French should regard the age, in which Louis sat upon the throne, as an age of national glory. But it was glorious, not for the extended dominions of his kingdom, nor for the splendid victories, which were followed by as disastrous defeats ; but because the men of letters gave to France a moral influence throughout the continent. The Grecian masterpieces in tragedy were imitated, and dramas were composed in rivalry of them, with the same severity of invention and careful execution, the same unity of design and manner, the same nobleness and heroic efforts of passion, and the Grecian heroes reappeared on the stage in their ancient sublimity, having lost only so much of their peculiar characteristics, as was needed to secure for them the sympathies of a modern nation. The French taste became the European taste ; the French models were in the hands of every well educated person of each sex, and thus the intelligence and literature of France were successful in gaining universal sovereignty, which was the more secure because willingly conceded. This command over the mind was

achieved by the men of letters, not by Louis ; and the Muse never manifested her superiority more remarkably.

And why should not the truth be spoken plainly of the character of Louis Fourteenth as a private man? He was a libertine, and yet a superstitious devotee. He was duped by his courtiers, governed by his mistress, beloved by nobody. How could he have been amiable, in whose hour of death not one friend was present? Mercenary hands closed the eyes of the monarch, who had at one time made Europe tremble for her independence. There is but one passage in his life, which is full of moral interest. It is the moment, when just before his end he calls his grandson to his bedside, and gives him the advice as of a man, whom approaching death had taught the wisdom of moderation. 'Do not imitate me,' says he, 'in the taste which I have had for war ; follow good counsels ; endeavor to be a solace to your people, that which I was so utterly unhappy as not to have been.' Louis Fourteenth died, as one ambitious of conquest deserves to die, a disappointed man. His history teaches the necessity of making a noble end the grand object of life, so that, if it be not attained, the mind may at least be saved from misery, through a consciousness of noble purposes.

We do not desire to investigate the impiety and profligacy of the succeeding regency and reign. Religion, justice, sound policy, human nature, even the majesty of God, were wilfully outraged, mocked, and profaned. It is known, that the licentiousness of the East was renewed at Paris ; but under what a difference of circumstances. In the East the voluptuousness of the sovereign is countenanced by hereditary usage, by the established laws, by the national religion. But in a Christian country, a Christian king introduced a wide spreading, desolating profligacy, in opposition to public morals, in violation of the laws, and in defiance of the religion, whose precepts should intimidate the audacity of libertinism, and teach the necessity of selfdenial.

With respect to the revolution, we may observe, that it was accelerated during this period by the increasing derangement of the finances, by the profligacy of the court, which took from religion its sanctity, from the nobles their ancient respectability, from the throne its dignity and its terror, and lastly by the misrule of corrupt ministers, who weakened the

government at home, and deprived it of all foreign influence. Louis Sixteenth, it has often been observed, in a peaceful situation might have exercised all the virtues of philanthropy. But he had not mind enough to perceive in what condition he was placed, nor resources and energy enough to act with promptness and decision in the emergencies, which were continually rising. His adhesion to the popular measures came too tardily to inspire gratitude or confidence in his sincerity. His policy was vacillating ; at one time he seemed to recognise the folly of opposing the public will ; and at another to entertain a secret hope of successfully counteracting it. He showed some traces of magnanimity in overstepping ancient prejudice, and making a protestant, a foreign republican, and still worse in the view of hereditary pride, a merchant, his minister of finances ; but the appointment of a plebeian was followed by his dismissal and banishment, so that the king exposed his feebleness by yielding, while he alienated all confidence by attempting to recede.

Mr Somerville is always careful to vindicate the spirit of liberty from participation in crime, and his remarks on the crisis now under consideration are more circumstantial. Two points become clear from considering the preceding periods of history. France needed to be relieved from the weight of feudal oppression, and the moral and intellectual condition of the nation was such, as could have been expected from the long continuance of a depraved and depraving despotism. The government was weak ; the national religion was subverted ; the courtiers had become wastefully prodigal ; internal commerce was restricted by unjust laws ; agriculture was injured by the multitude of holidays ; the court was licentious ; vague and perhaps perverse notions of liberty were circulating among the people ; the throne was supported by few men of untarnished integrity ; opinion had ceased to be the support of monarchy ; the demands of the treasury surpassed its resources ; and feudal usage still exempted the nobles and the clergy from taxation. Add to this the condition of the nation ; that the nobles were for the most part ignorant and corrupt ; fond of their privileges and vain of their distinction ; that the people, little advanced in civilization, only felt themselves oppressed and on the verge of ruin ;

that wit and genius were busy in throwing ridicule on the false pretensions of the higher orders, and the absurdities of despotism ; that men of cunning, reason, and overpowering eloquence were engaged in discussing the character of governments and the methods of reform ; and that politicians of most acute understandings, some of them ingenious in sophistry, others of consummate natural gifts, but of little practical experience, were investigating every subject connected with education, government, and religion.

As an expedient against present ruin the States General were assembled. This was the moment, when it became possible for the people to express their discontent, to enforce their just demands, and to secure for themselves a guarantee against future oppression. Yet several circumstances were of inauspicious omen. The privileged orders were still infatuated with a love of their rank and immunities ; the king and the royal party were never prudent enough to foresee what would be imperatively demanded ; and, instead of conceding in season to excite confidence in the people, they retained everything till it was violently claimed. The States General, formed into a Constituent Assembly, were prepared to reform ; yet in a country where no free institutions had ever existed, how was it possible to collect a class of practical statesmen ? Moreover, they began a reform, to which no limits were set, and where there were no landmarks to guide. Yet the doctrine of liberty was asserted with temperance and success, and humanity has no cause to blush for the principles which the assembly maintained.

‘ The Constituent Assembly,’ says Mr Somerville, ‘ proclaimed universal toleration in matters of religion, and thus made virtue the test of piety, and took away from hypocrisy the mask of truth ; it rendered monastic seclusion obligatory only on the consciences of devotees, and thus relieved many from the intolerable hardship of being imprisoned for life, in spite of repentance. It abolished *Lettres de Cachet*, and thus deprived the king of the power of exiling and ruining any individual, or of shutting him up for life in solitary confinement to gratify private resentment, or the persecuting caprice of any great man ; it forbade the future use of torture, and thus deprived the amateurs of cruelty of all opportunity of enjoying spectacles of agony ; it ordered all criminal prosecutions to be carried on in public, and thus stript prosecutors and false witnesses of the chance of perjuring themselves with impunity ; whilst,

by adopting the trial by jury, it secured to the accused, not only the probability of acquittal when innocent, but that most beautiful privilege of a British subject, the right of being presumed innocent until proved guilty. By establishing the liberty of the press, it secured to truth an ultimate triumph over error, in spite of the abuse of that privilege, which followed in the first hours of its fruition. By putting down the peculiar privileges of the noblesse, and by limiting the prerogatives of the crown, it sought to preserve personal freedom. By exploding the whole system of monopoly, it revived industry, and by suppressing the motley group of provincial laws, one of the relics of feudal barbarism, it opened the way for the establishment of a regular tariff, and a general code of laws. By the division and sale of the great estates of the clergy and crown, it brought them into cultivation, and rescued an immense body of people from a state of idleness, which perpetuated their ignorance. By arming the national guards or militia, it covered France with a shield; and by renouncing the right of conquest, it tried to take away from her neighbors all excuse for assailing her. Such, as far as I can learn from history and tradition, were the principal acts of the Constituent Assembly.' pp. 148—149.

With this the French revolution, properly speaking, was terminated. Had France been permitted by foreign nations to have matured her institutions in peace, and had her king been honestly and energetically attached to freedom and justice, the nation would have risen at once to a high degree of happiness and power, and other nations would have been prompted to imitate her institutions by peaceable reforms.

But the members of the Constituent Assembly were not permitted to complete their work. A law prohibited their re-election; and a host of new politicians, eager to distinguish themselves by farther reforms or innovations, composed the Legislative Assembly. The spirit of liberty now began to be supplanted by that of lawlessness. It has been often disputed, whether atheism or superstition is the worst enemy of religion; it may in like manner be doubted, whether abject submission to arbitrary power, or a hatred of all restraint, is the most adverse to liberty. The former ruins the present prosperity of men, but the latter mocks their hopes, and cheats them of success when it seems certain. The French nation had become engrained with the vices of a long continuing despotism; government seemed but another name for oppression; and thus the nation could be led to acts of cruelty by men, who pretended a fanatical admiration of liberty, and yet

were chiefly influenced by their desire of private aggrandizement. A free people is never a merciless one.

Mr Somerville analyses the character of the Legislative Assembly, the National Convention, and the fearful governments, which succeeded. During these days the enlightened defenders of liberty were possessed of little influence. Necker was in exile; La Fayette was obliged to fly for his safety; and many of the purest advocates of free institutions were massacred, or transported to America. The crimes of this period were the offspring of the corruption, which the former despotism had rendered almost universal. They must be attributed, however, not solely to an evil spirit in the nation, but to pride, excited by foreign invasion. The most atrocious deeds were committed in moments of the greatest peril. The author next proceeds to the advancement of Napoleon, and treats of his character, and the benefits which he conferred upon France in the first period of his elevation. The French people did not submit to him from fickleness, nor from indifference to liberty. He came upon them, when they were exhausted by unnatural efforts, and desired nothing so ardently as repose. In continuation of this subject, Mr Somerville devotes several letters to observations on the government of the emperor, his fall, the restoration and unwise administration of the Bourbons, the return of Napoleon, his second abdication, and the second invasion of France by the allies.

In 1819 the administration of Decazes gave to liberty an opportunity of developing its powers. During his short ministry all accounts agree, that the nation received a new impulse, and improved in industry, commerce, and inventions. The liberty of the press was perfect, and the government began to gain the confidence of the nation. Decazes seems to have fallen, from a want of sufficient disinterestedness. He could have continued in office, if he had been uniformly true to a liberal policy. As the event has shown, the liberal party were not discreet in opposing him. Had they made some sacrifices, and given over contending for points, which they could only contend for, without any prospect of success, they might have upheld a more than moderately liberal ministry. In their sincere love of perfectly free institutions, and their consequent unwillingness to make any compromise with

circumstances, or in their triumphant expectations of soon possessing all authority, they united with their bitterest enemies to bring about the fall of Decazes, and lost the only opportunity of securing present liberty to their country.

The insincerity of Decazes, and the imprudence of the liberal party, were followed by the complete annihilation of the political influence of both, by a royalist ministry, a series of arbitrary infringements on the letter and spirit of the charter, and those changes in the mode of election, which have secured to the aristocracy the continued, and, as it would seem from the character of the members recently chosen, the almost undisputed possession of political authority and influence. Mr Somerville enters largely on these topics; explains the royalist politics, and speaks of the arguments used in favor of despotism. He closes his work with observations on the internal condition of France, and much valuable and practical information on the progress of agriculture and manufactures.

The period of history, through which we have been conducted, does but increase our admiration of liberty, and our belief of its final triumph. Present prospects are indeed gloomy, not so much because the conspiracy of kings is irresistible, as because the people are passive and content to endure. Perhaps a despot, of powerful mind and large resources, could lull the advocates for reform once more to silence, and bring back the lethargic apathy, from which Europe has but just been awakened. Yet during the whole series of eventful struggles and collisions, which have indeed been followed by too few advantages to satisfy the hopes of philanthropy, the general progress of liberal opinion is distinctly visible. The despots have grown more considerate, are cautious in their acts of tyranny, and avoid prodigality and waste. Public opinion is an invisible, but constant and influential power, which makes itself felt in every cabinet of Europe. Farther, that constitutional governments are superior to arbitrary monarchies is a principle, which is no longer questioned. The emperor of Russia has acknowledged it at Warsaw and at Petersburg; and the Prussian king pledged his royal faith, that he would act by it. The press is not yet free; but of old the censorship was a regular, established affair; now it is defended only as a necessary infringement of the public rights, a temporary exercise of a dictatorial author-

ity, required by the urgency of the times. The principle is conceded, though the right itself is withheld. For these acts of injustice the party in power quote the example of the Roman republic, and can, unfortunately, strengthen their argument by the recent practice of the English parliament.

If we consider the permanent results of the French revolution, they are auspicious and consolatory. What has France gained by it?

'She has gained,' Mr Somerville replies, 'a new territorial division of the kingdom, by which her various dissimilar provinces have been melted down into one community; an abolition of the privileges of the *noblesse*; the suppression of an oppressive ecclesiastical system, and of the right in religious corporations to hold landed property; an equal assessment of taxes over the whole kingdom; the establishment of a uniform system of jurisprudence, with the trial by jury; a respect for talents over birth, with a free access of any Frenchman to any employment, civil or military; the equality of all, in the eye of the law; the subdivision of the great estates of the kingdom; the emancipation of industry from the shackles of *Jurandes* and *Maitrisses*, and consequently great improvements in manufactures and husbandry; freedom of conscience in matters of religion; the liberty of the press, at least for books; a representative form of government, with a long et cetera of inferior advantages.' p. 13.

Much progress has, therefore, been made; and where a representation once exists, the character of the government will be still farther modified by the character of those who are governed. Yet many causes unite to impede the present establishment of perfectly free institutions.

The peasantry of France are extremely ignorant. Whole villages may be found, where not more than three or four can read. Even in the immediate vicinity of Paris, and within the echoes of the legislative debates, there are towns in which not three newspapers are taken, and those not by persons, who actually belong to the people. The eloquent pleas for liberty are of no effect, for they are not heard by the mass of the nation. Hence no general political spirit exists, except when the popularity of individuals is concerned, or as the taxes of the state affect private interests; and national attention can hardly be directed to refined questions on the management of the elections, and the free expressions of opinion. So great is the popular ignorance, that the most liberal politicians have

never advocated any very wide extension of the elective franchise, believing it to be first necessary to educate the nation.

Thus the first obstacle to the progress of liberty in France is found in the political ignorance and uninstructed condition of the people. It is also a characteristic of that cheerful nation to look at the bright side of a picture, to bear necessary evils with an elastic sprightliness, which is almost magnanimity. They are always content, if possible, and if there be anything captivating in the party in power, they are willing to applaud and coincide with the majority. The fondness for living at Paris would be productive of good, by promoting the circulation of political ideas, were it not, that Paris exercises an absolute dominion over the mind and tastes of the nation. The country is left without its due influence ; men throng from all quarters to the banks of the Seine, not to interchange ideas, and form enlarged views from the collisions of various independent parties, but to learn and adopt the principles and tastes of the metropolis.

Yet, after all, how can liberty make rapid progress in a country, where the peculiar privileges of citizens are hardly known and little esteemed ? The French have not yet learned to value their political existence ; they have so long been subjects, that they hardly know what it is to participate in governing. They set a disproportionate value on social equality. It is not enough to secure the rights of person and property, liberty of speech, and equality before all tribunals ; they will admit of no difference in the terms of intercourse, and are offended at any attention bestowed on high rank or superior wealth. This is a weakness, which has been very apparent in many parts of recent French history, and has proved injurious, because it has made common courtesies sometimes withdraw the attention from actual injustice.

We find another class of causes, which have retarded the progress of liberty in France, in the mismanagement of the liberal party. They have never acted with that perfect union, which resigns all private and peculiar feelings to the great object of the public good. They have mingled their ancient prejudices and enmities with their defence of liberty ; and they have never had any well organized system of cooperation. Their metaphysical refinements in politics have been of no general advantage. They have formed and advocated

systems of polity, when there was need of champions for practical reform, and the most ingenious arguments in the chamber of deputies have sometimes been made without effect, because they were founded on the theories of individuals.

But far more injury has been done by an unconciliating, confident course. They relied on the justice and popularity of their cause ; the nation was probably disposed to support them with steadiness ; but it desired peace, was conscious of prosperity, knew that their finances were in a better condition than those of any European nation, and that France was fast regaining prosperity and wealth. The popular leaders found no fermented nation ; they threw themselves, as they thought, on the sea of political commotion ; but the waves were still.

The confidence of the liberals injured their cause, for it excited opposition. The royalists, at the first and second restoration, had been moved by the strong passion of revenge to do some things, which were prohibited by the charter. The liberals urged relentlessly the revocation of such acts ; and in one instance at least, in the case of those who were banished by a royal edict, demanded as a right, what the king was already resolved to concede as a proof of leniency. In these cases they acted as high minded men, yet consulted but poorly for the final advantage of their cause. The liberal side in the chamber of deputies lost much influence, from the circumstance of the various elements of which it was composed. Some were suspected of having formerly been too sincerely attached to the fortunes of the emperor ; some were charged with a design of overturning the regal government ; and the belief was prevalent, that, even if all were honest in their preference of liberty, the zeal of many was quickened by the expectation of preferment under the new order of things.

A third class of causes, impeding the progress of liberty in France, is found in the essential obstacles, which must always exist in a country where monarchical institutions are deeply rooted. The atheism of the last century, and the terrible irreligion of France during a portion of her revolutionary governments, had not been able to wear away even the rust of superstition ; and all the enthusiasm for liberty, all the suffering under the despotism of the emperor, all the crosses and dis-

appointments under the restoration, have not been enough to eradicate the attachment of the nation to a regal government. The desire of a republic in France was never a deeply rooted attachment to that form of government, but only the frenzy of a moment. At present the organization of the army, the church, the municipal and provincial jurisdiction, presuppose a monarch at their head, and a monarch possessed of extensive prerogatives. Historical recollections are not easily to be effaced. It is uncomfortable to many to reject forms, which are associated with stories of ancient valor and renown, to part with a government, which is connected with every tradition, every work of art, every public enterprise.

Yet while there is reason to fear, that the constitution of France will not be administered in the spirit of impartial liberty, there is no ground for fearing its absolute, nor even its virtual abolition. The royalists do not desire such an abolition, for it would be to surrender the power they have gained, and to receive from royal caprice the honors and consideration, which they are now able to obtain, and to dispense by the laws. The utmost which they can meditate, consists in such modifications of the charter, as will secure all power to themselves. Hitherto the men of science and letters have been distinguished for the adulation they have paid to royalty. They are so still. But some of them enjoy the rank of peers and counsellors of state; their pride, a pitiful pride for men of the first eminence in science, is gratified by the dignity, and though they never will advocate the principles of democracy, they will not advocate such an exclusive superiority of the higher orders, as would leave themselves without political distinction.

We accustom ourselves also to have good hopes respecting the future. The combination of the allied sovereigns cannot endure, if any inference may be drawn from the fate of former coalitions, or from the elements of which the present is composed. The respective powers have had, and must continue to have, mutual jealousies. Though the sword of the Prussian now rests peaceably in its scabbard, it cannot be forgotten, that it first gained the lustre and keenness of its edge in its contests with Austria. It is, moreover, the true policy of Prussia to favor liberal principles, and she cannot long re-

main untrue to her higher destiny. Her government is administered with unparalleled economy. The king expends, as it were, nothing for his private pleasures; his equipage and attendants do not surpass the limits of a moderate private fortune. And as for the execution of civil justice, there is no country where the guiltless is more sure to escape, or the injured to gain redress. Still more may be said in praise of Prussia. She has of late years uniformly and systematically made exertions to diffuse the advantages of education, and promote every liberal science and every elegant art. The private galleries of the king have been collected, the palaces at Potsdam and Berlin stripped of their ornaments, that public schools might be opened to the artists, and a constant source of improvement and delight to the public. A liberal Protestant church is supported by a regular, learned, and sufficiently numerous ministry; village schools are provided for the instruction of the peasantry; every considerable town has at least one gymnasium, and sometimes several; while the universities of Berlin, Halle, Bonne, and Breslau, yield in excellence to none, and have only Göttingen for a successful rival. Placed as the country is, with a vast frontier, in the centre of Europe, exposed to an attack on all sides, whether from France, Austria, or the Czar, it has been felt, that nothing but the public spirit of the nation can preserve its existence, and that spirit has been kept up by the gradual abolition of all feudal wrongs, and the general diffusion of intelligence. A government, which entrusts its security to the keeping of a well instructed nation, is essentially a free one.

We do not believe that the Holy Alliance can continue; and much may be expected from the progress of political knowledge. The principles of government are every day more widely and universally discussed. They are exhibiting themselves also in practice on a grander scale than the world has ever yet witnessed. The new republics, which are starting into existence in the American hemispheres, will exercise a powerful influence on the political condition of Europe. A system of states will be formed, embracing all parts of the civilized world, and, by containing examples of every form of government, will enable the nations to decide from practical experience, which forms are usually administered with the soundest wisdom, and are productive of the greatest good.

We trust also not a little in the native force of liberty. Its orb may be darkened, but never quenched; its beams obscured for the moment, but tomorrow repaired. From the days of Marathon to that of Waterloo, whenever the armies of liberty and despotism have been arrayed against each other, the fairest cause has almost always been victorious. A nation rising in arms is not to be subdued by mercenary troops. It was the spirit of liberty, though under the form of enthusiastic frenzy, which made the arms of the French republic invincible; the spirit of liberty left to Napoleon in Spain victories without conquest, and trophies without dominion; it was the spirit of liberty, which animated the German nation, when they collected all the zeal and force for which their character is remarkable, and poured across the Rhine to protect their independence. And still at Waterloo, the British believed themselves engaged for the rights and welfare of mankind, and the Prussians, yet the dupes of royal promises, fought, as they believed, for national independence and internal freedom.

But, whatever may be the ultimate condition of Europe, the lessons of liberty will continue to be taught. We return home from the review of European governments, with new love for our national advantages, and with new zeal to support them. We recur to this topic, which is, as it should be, a very common one, not from a spirit of national vanity, but that we may feel gratitude to the great Parent of the nations, under whose Providence our republic has grown up to prosperity; and may cherish with the more sacred love the memory of those who achieved our liberties, and be mutually encouraged to watch for the preservation and integrity of our institutions. In other countries even the best men are divided in their views of politics, but in America there exists and can exist no such division. Here all our feelings are in harmony. Patriotism, respect for existing forms, reverence for the memory of our fathers, all unite to inspire the love of a liberal democracy. We have no deluding recollection of the virtues and prowess of chivalry to cheat us into admiration of feudal institutions. Safe from foreign influence, blessed with an even and impartial administration of justice, and feeling our mild government only by the freedom and safety which it ensures us, we can observe with calmness the political career of

our public men, and choose the most intelligent and patriotic to administer our laws, dreading no extensions of prerogatives, no unlawful usurpations, no attacks on our private peace and comforts, and acknowledging no triumvirate but the eternal one, of truth, virtue, and liberty.

ART. IV.—*Il Decameron di Messer Giovanni Boccaccio, corretto ed illustrato con Note tratte da Vari, dal Dott. Giulio Ferrario.* 4 vols. 8vo. Milano. 1803.

ITALY, it has been observed by one of the most ingenious and elegant historians of modern times, has peculiar cause to exult in the state of her literature during the fourteenth century. At that period the north of Europe still continued buried in the night of darkness, which attended and followed the dismemberment of the Western Empire; or, if a ray of light shone out here and there in the British Isles, in Germany, or among the remoter tribes beyond them, it seems to have been but a faint and fitful glimmering, only just enough to illuminate and render visible the capricious barbarism of the conquerors of the Cæsars. The literature of the south of Europe, however, was just springing into being, with the flush and freshness of youth upon it. The songs of the troubadours, and the romances of chivalry, exhibiting all the charm of simplicity, raciness, and vigor, began ere now to be produced, in the fertility of a virgin soil, all over the contiguous countries of Italy, Spain, Portugal, and France. The people of these favored lands spoke kindred dialects of one great language, formed by incorporating the Teutonic idioms with such scattered fragments of the Roman tongue, as had survived the destruction of the Roman power; and their poetry displays an age not of imitation, nor of improvement on the past, but an age of first creation, like that in the times before among the primitive Greeks.

But there was this remarkable particular in which the Italians were distinguished in literature, from their sister nations in the south of Europe. The literature of the latter, as observed by Sismondi, belongs to the respective nations them-